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Summary record of the 11th meeting
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Chairman: Mr. Chowdhury ..... (Bangladesh)
later: Mrs. Incera (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Costa Rica)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 118: Joint Inspection Unit (A/51/34 and A/51/559 and Corr.1; A/52/34, A/52/206 and A/52/267)

1. **Mr. Othman** (Chairman of the Joint Inspection Unit), introducing the annual reports of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) for 1996 and 1997, the programmes of work for 1996-1997 and 1997-1998, and the preliminary programme of work for 1998-1999, said that the Unit was making every effort to enhance its functioning and rationalize its programme of work pursuant to the recommendations of General Assembly resolution 50/233. The Unit had developed basic principles and parameters with a view to optimizing the formulation of its programme of work and would henceforth place more emphasis on administrative, budgetary and managerial issues, which constituted more than 60 per cent and 70 per cent respectively of the two programmes of work currently before the Fifth Committee. The Unit was also producing more system-wide and multi-organization reports. Such reports, necessarily more complex, required much time to complete in view of the amount of data to be collected, not only from the 23 participating organizations but also, for comparison purposes, from non-United Nations organizations. They were also a great deal more costly than reports on a single organization.

2. In order to finalize its work programme and avoid duplication and overlap, the Unit exchanged information and views with other oversight bodies. The draft was sent for comments to the Board of Auditors and the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), with which the Unit had held trilateral coordination meetings. Furthermore, the Unit had benefited in 1997 from the comments made by the Auditor General of Canada. Even once it had been finalized, the Unit's programme of work could be changed to meet new requirements. The Unit sought to ensure that its programme of work did not duplicate the work of other oversight mechanisms and attached the greatest importance to the feedback and comments of Member States.

3. Pursuant to the request of the General Assembly in resolution 50/233, paragraph 13, the Unit had decided to change its programme of work cycle from January-December to July-June, in order to ensure the timely presentation of its reports to legislative organs. In spite of efforts undertaken in that regard, including increased reliance on information technology, the Unit still experienced some difficulties in meeting deadlines. Increased access to internal information and more rapid responses from participating organizations should help it to improve that situation.

4. The format of new Unit reports was easier to read, and the conclusions and recommendations they contained were more specifically targeted, which should facilitate implementation and follow-up. The 32-page limit had been respected.

5. The quality of the reports was to a large extent dependent on the skills and expertise of inspectors and the effectiveness of research staff. However, with regard to recruitment, the Unit had experienced difficulties which adversely affected its work. As he had already stressed, the Unit needed more independence in the choice of its staff.

6. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 50/214, paragraph 63, the Unit had established appropriate procedures for allocating travel funds in order to ensure their most effective use in carrying out studies and activities expressly related to the implementation of its programme of work. By further developing those procedures, the Unit had been able to reduce travel costs substantially, which, together with new directions, had enabled it to propose a negative growth budget for the biennium 1998-1999.

7. After studying ways of improving the effectiveness of the leadership roles of its Chairman and Vice-Chairman, including modifying the rotational practice, the Unit had decided that, with effect from 1999, the current practice of electing the Chairman and Vice-Chairman for a regionally rotated one-year term would no longer be followed. Even after that change, the role of the Chairman might continue to be quite limited in comparison with the situation in other oversight bodies.

8. In response to a Unit initiative, its first meeting with the Board of Auditors and OIOS, held in May 1997, had been devoted to organizational and procedural issues. A substantive meeting was scheduled to be held in New York on or around 12 November 1997, in order to coordinate respective programmes of work and take advantage of complementarities. The Unit continued to provide the General Assembly with its comments, as appropriate, on OIOS final reports. The Unit had also taken part in the annual meeting of internal audit services of the United Nations system, had had meetings with a number of national audit officials, and had participated in a symposium on oversight in the organizations of the United Nations system. The Chairman had held meetings on the role of the Unit and oversight issues with the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General.

9. The Unit had completed the development of internal standards and guidelines for inspection, evaluation and investigation, which were attached to the Unit's 1996 report (A/51/34) as annex I. They should allow member States, other expert bodies and the secretariats of participating organizations to gain a better understanding of how the Unit fulfilled its mandate. They were to be supplemented by internal working procedures.

10. The Unit's proposals concerning the establishment of a follow-up system on its reports and recommendations appeared in the 1997 report (A/52/34) as annex I. The lack of a clear follow-up mechanism had long been a matter of concern to the Unit and member States. The system submitted for approval to the Fifth Committee, which was intended to remedy that deficiency, was based on the concept of shared responsibility, as called for in General Assembly resolution 50/233. It proposed a number of specific procedures, including a tracking system which would permit the Unit to track every step taken towards the consideration of JIU reports and implementation of the recommendations they contained. The Unit would therefore be able to monitor the impact of its recommendations on a continuous basis.

11. Referring in conclusion to the Secretary-General's programme for reform, he said that the first track of proposed reforms would take into account some of the Unit's proposals. However, he wished to repeat yet again that the executive heads of participating organizations were free to choose whether to accept those recommendations, which only member States could turn into decisions for implementation.

12. **Mr. Dvinianine** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation attached great importance to the work of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU). Without reiterating in detail the problems referred to in the reports, he wished to draw attention to the errors in the Russian version of the JIU report on outsourcing (A/52/338, table on page 20, and pages 21-23). He requested that the Russian version of the document should be reissued.

13. ***Mrs. Incera*** *(Costa Rica), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

14. **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria) welcomed the improvement of the content and presentation of the Unit's reports. It was regrettable, however, that JIU still faced certain practical difficulties, particularly with regard to the recruitment of staff and the selection of inspectors, which were detrimental to its work. His delegation noted that the Unit had held coordination meetings with other oversight bodies, such as the Board of Auditors and the Office of Internal Oversight Services. It was imperative that the coordination should continue since it was a means of avoiding duplication of work and enhancing the complementarity of the various bodies. The implementation of and follow-up to the Unit's recommendations remained a cause for concern. His delegation wished to emphasize in that regard the concept of shared responsibility in accordance with which it was incumbent upon member States, the Joint Inspection Unit and the secretariats of the participating organizations to ensure that the work of the Unit had the desired impact. His delegation reaffirmed its full support for the Unit, which played an essential role, and would contribute actively to the debate on the enhancement of its working methods.

15. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) said that the United States would remain active in ensuring that oversight functions, both internal and external, were carried out effectively within the United Nations. The work of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) was therefore of interest to his delegation.

16. With regard to the JIU report for 1996 (A/51/34), he welcomed the internal standards and guidelines contained in annex I, and hoped that inspection procedures would comply with those provisions in the future. The report should, however, have placed greater emphasis on the Unit's achievements over the period under consideration, rather than dwelling on the inadequacy of its resources and the obstacles it encountered during inspections.

17. By contrast, the report for 1997 (A/52/34) was concise and constructive. There was a clear need for the mechanism outlined in annex I, which would enable the Unit to monitor systematically compliance with its recommendations. If it was to be effective, the mechanism must be applied only in the case of inspection reports which satisfied the criteria set out in paragraph 4 of the annex. The Unit should also take steps to analyse reactions to its recommendations, including any negative ones, particularly those of other oversight bodies, such as the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) and the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), before examining their follow-up.

18. His delegation would like to know what progress had been made with regard to the establishment of the Information and Documentation Centre referred to in paragraph 53 of document A/51/34; what measures were to be taken to ensure that the Unit's staff came from all the participating organizations; and which skills the Unit's staff currently lacked (A/52/34, para. 29).

19. He noted with satisfaction that, overall, the Unit's inspection reports were more reader-friendly and their presentation was more attractive, improvements which were

very evident in the report on the challenge of outsourcing (A/52/338).

20. The work programme of the Joint Inspection Unit for 1997-1998, as outlined in document A/52/267, seemed ambitious and comprehensive, although the time-frame within which the inspections were to be accomplished was somewhat unclear. His delegation had a particular interest in the reviews of the ACC coordination machinery and the United Nations University. It would prefer to see more narrowly focused, less comprehensive inspections, which would be more likely to result in clear recommendations that could be implemented by programme managers.

21. The report on the implementation of the recommendations of JIU (A/52/206) would have been more useful if it had indicated which actions were a direct result of its recommendations.

22. Lastly, his delegation considered that the Unit's comments in paragraphs 9 and 10 of document A/52/380 regarding the OIOS report on the United Nations Logistics Base at Brindisi, exceeded the scope of its competence. It would be preferable if in future the Unit concentrated on its own work programme.

Organization of work (A/C.5/52/L.1/Rev.1)

23. **Ms. Duschner** (Canada) asked when the report of the Secretary-General on the establishment and financing of rapidly deployable mission headquarters would be made available since, according to document A/C.5/52/L.1/Rev.1, the report should already have been issued. The report must appear without delay so that it could be considered in due course by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions to enable the Fifth Committee to discuss it in the course of the current session.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.